



The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 2 November 1968



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THE PRESIDENT'S
DAILY BRIEF
2 NOVEMBER 1968

1. Vietnam

Hanoi has broadcast a qualified endorsement of a four-party meeting as one of the next steps in the Paris talks. This grudging and circumscribed approval, which puts the question of a political solution to the war in the background, leaves plenty of room for a complicated procedural wrangle in Paris. The broadcast runs through the full list of hardline Communist positions on a settlement and calls the bombing halt a "great victory," but "only the initial one."

On the other hand, the South Vietnamese have balked at attending the next session of the Paris talks under the arrangements described by President Johnson. Thieu yesterday objected specifically to the arrangements for the inclusion of the National Liberation Front at the talks in terms that leave him little room for further maneuver. Domestic political considerations no doubt weighed heavily in Thieu's calculations, and he may believe they require him to take this kind of independent position--at least for the moment.

The Communists initiated a mortar attack on Quang Tri city about three hours after the bombing halt took effect. This is the only significant action reported since the halt began; some 30 rounds fell on the city.

2. Egypt

The successful Israeli raid deep behind the Egyptian lines north of Aswan laid bare Egyptian vulnerability to Israel's highly professional military operations. Nasir, however, is not likely to get the message. Instead, he will probably decide this is no time to show weakness by relaxing Egypt's aggressive military posture.

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3. Communist China

The regime has just announced the conclusion of the first plenum of the party Central Committee in over two years. The biggest thing to come out of the session was a public commitment to convene at an unspecified future date the long-overdue ninth party congress.

While this is a big step toward closing out the Cultural Revolution, the party--and the country--are not yet out of the woods. The plenum was probably stormy, with various factions arguing over who would be given power in the reconstructed party apparatus.

The patronage question is a sticky one. Radical beneficiaries of the Cultural Revolution on one hand, and veteran party cadres on the other, are likely to be engaged in bitter political warfare for some time to come.

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4. Brazil

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5. Soviet Union

If the Soyuz spacecraft has a role in Soviet manned lunar missions--and we are not certain about this--Beregovoy's flight doesn't get them much closer to the moon. No significant advances were demonstrated, despite the long wait since Komarov crashed in April 1967. If the Soviets go by the book, additional manned flights will be necessary before they are ready for more advanced missions, such as construction of a manned earth space station or a manned circumlunar flight.

At Annex we speculate on some of the pressures facing the men running the Soviet circumlunar program.

6. Panama

Antijunta students and professors are planning to join a "silent march" of slum dwellers in Panama City on independence day--3 November--and they may attempt to stage protest demonstrations against the National Guard. The Communist Party, which nominally dominates the largest student federation, has been urging the students to cool it, but with little success. The Communists fear further repression if the students get out of hand.

The government should be able to control the situation, but serious clashes cannot be ruled out.

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7. Egypt -
Soviet Union

[redacted] Egypt and the Soviets have concluded agreements for the building of Soviet-designed merchant ships at the new shipyard in Alexandria. The Soviets will supply the materials and supervise ship construction--in fact, it looks as if the entire shipyard will be under direct Soviet control.

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About two-thirds of yard capacity will be used for new merchant-ship construction, leaving the remaining third available for naval repairs and refits. This would supplement the facilities already available to Soviet naval vessels at the Egyptian Navy base in Alexandria.

8. Britain-Rhodesia

London's latest terms for a settlement in effect assure continued white rule in Rhodesia. As it now stands Wilson, and not Smith, has made most of the concessions. Further bargaining is still to come, but Wilson has already set aside his pledge not to grant independence before majority African rule--the heart of the British negotiating position.

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ANNEX

The Soviet Lunar Program: To Gamble or
Not to Gamble?

The announcement that NASA is considering flying Apollo 8 around the moon in December has probably created a dilemma for Soviet leaders.

We believe that they realized some time ago they could not beat the US to a manned lunar landing and hoped instead to upstage the US effort by making the first manned flight around the moon. A successful moon flight by Apollo 8 would deny the Soviets this propaganda victory and could cause them to regard their entire manned circumlunar program as a failure.

They might, therefore, go for broke and attempt a manned circumlunar mission ahead of Apollo 8. This would be extremely risky, however, since it would mean accelerating greatly the pace of their program, which has been plagued by serious technical problems that resulted in the failure of two, and probably three, of their four flights to date.

The success of Zond 5 in September might encourage them to gamble on a manned flight. Last week's urgent Soviet demarches asking for immediate permission to station recovery aircraft in India and Ceylon suggests that they are at least keeping open the option of gambling on a manned circumlunar flight before Apollo 8. Aircraft in India and Ceylon would be within easy reach of the area of the Indian Ocean where Zond 5 was recovered. We need more information, however, before we can say with certainty that the Soviets plan to shoot the works.

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

- 1.) Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
- 2.) North Vietnamese Reflections of U S
Political Attitudes



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Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
for the President's Eyes Only

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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Chinese Position: Chinese Foreign Minister Chen Yi reportedly told Le Duc Tho that, although Peking remains opposed to negotiated settlement in Vietnam, it will "tolerate" any decision Hanoi takes in this regard.

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Chen's reported assurance to the North Vietnamese is in line with earlier [] Chinese statements recognizing Peking's lack of decisive influence in Hanoi.

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Although there has been a progressive deterioration in Sino-Vietnamese relations, such statements strongly indicate that Peking has grudgingly reconciled itself to Hanoi's negotiation tactics and will continue to support and encourage Hanoi's war effort while the talks continue.

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Indoctrination in the South: A long, exhortatory statement which was published in the Hanoi army journal on 26 October appears to contain the core of the political indoctrination program which has been under way for several weeks among Communists in the South. The article was written under the pseudonym "Chien Thang" (combatant), an unidentified but frequent North Vietnamese commentator on the battlefield situation in South Vietnam.

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Chien Thang invariably takes a tough and confident line, but this statement is unusually strident in its assertions that the Communists have won stronger military and political positions through their efforts of the past year. He argues that in war everything hinges on whether "the strategic position is good or bad," and he repeatedly asserts that the events of the past year have put the Communists in a favorable position and forced the allies into a weak and defensive one. This is the standard Hanoi line on the results of this year's "general offensive and general uprising," and this article probably is another effort to reassure Communists in the South about their prospects and the magnitude of their alleged accomplishments. Chien Thang reminds his readers, however, that difficult days still lie ahead, and he calls for a continuation of intensive military action.

Despite its militant tone and its emphasis on alleged military achievements, the article specifically rules out a military victory for the Communists. Instead, Chien Thang puts the goal in terms of frustrating the achievement of US military and political objectives. His language is not tempered by anything suggesting that the Communists are willing to compromise their own objectives, but he does leave room for tactical maneuvering and for greater emphasis on the political aspects of the struggle. He says, for instance, that the balance of power in Vietnam is determined not only by military power but also by political forces, "which possess very great strength." He calls these forces "an important offensive wedge, a vigorous blow directly affecting even the political objectives of the war." In what could be a hint that these forces are about to assume greater importance, he cites alleged "disharmony" between US military and political policies and claims that US strategy is "unable to cope with the situation on both the military and political fronts."

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Burchett Back: Wilfred Burchett, the Communist newsman occasionally used by Hanoi for contacts with Western newsmen, has returned to Phnom Penh from a few weeks in the North Vietnamese capital. He did not file any significant copy from Hanoi, but the timing of his visit suggests that he probably did get a reading on Hanoi's new propaganda objectives in the new phase of the talks which will open up in the wake of the US bombing halt.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

There is nothing of significance to report today.

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